**What is Machine Learning**

Before we take a look at the details of various machine learning methods, let's start by looking at what machine learning is, and what it isn't. Machine learning is often categorized as a subfield of artificial intelligence, but I find that categorization can often be misleading at first brush. The study of machine learning certainly arose from research in this context, but in the data science application of machine learning methods, it's more helpful to think of machine learning as a means of building models of data.

Fundamentally, machine learning involves building mathematical models to help understand data. "Learning" enters the fray when we give these models tunable parameters that can be adapted to observed data; in this way the program can be considered to be "learning" from the data. Once these models have been fit to previously seen data, they can be used to predict and understand aspects of newly observed data. I'll leave to the reader the more philosophical digression regarding the extent to which this type of mathematical, model-based "learning" is similar to the "learning" exhibited by the human brain. Understanding the problem setting in machine learning is essential to using these tools effectively, and so we will start with some broad categorizations of the types of approaches we'll discuss here.

**Categories of Machine Leaning**

At the most fundamental level, machine learning can be categorized into two main types: supervised learning and unsupervised learning.

Supervised learning involves somehow modeling the relationship between measured features of data and some label associated with the data; once this model is determined, it can be used to apply labels to new, unknown data. This is further subdivided into classification tasks and regression tasks: in classification, the labels are discrete categories, while in regression, the labels are continuous quantities. We will see examples of both types of supervised learning in the following section.

Unsupervised learning involves modeling the features of a dataset without reference to any label and is often described as "letting the dataset speak for itself." These models include tasks such as clustering and dimensionality reduction. Clustering algorithms identify distinct groups of data, while dimensionality reduction algorithms search for more succinct representations of the data. We will see examples of both types of unsupervised learning in the following section.

**Need for Machine Learning**

Human beings, at this moment, are the most intelligent and advanced species on earth because they can think, evaluate, and solve complex problems. On the other side, AI is still in its initial stage and have not surpassed human intelligence in many aspects. Then the question is that what is the need to make machine learn? The most suitable reason for doing this is, “to make decisions, based on data, with efficiency and scale”.

Lately, organizations are investing heavily in newer technologies like Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Deep Learning to get the key information from data to perform several real-world tasks and solve problems. We can call it data-driven decisions taken by machines, particularly to automate the process. These data-driven decisions can be used, instead of using programing logic, in the problems that cannot be programmed inherently. The fact is that we can’t do without human intelligence, but other aspect is that we all need to solve real-world problems with efficiency at a huge scale. That is why the need for machine learning arises.

**Challenges in Machines Learning**

While Machine Learning is rapidly evolving, making significant strides with cybersecurity and autonomous cars, this segment of AI as whole still has a long way to go. The reason behind is that ML has not been able to overcome number of challenges. The challenges that ML is facing currently are −

1. Quality of data − Having good-quality data for ML algorithms is one of the biggest challenges. Use of low-quality data leads to the problems related to data preprocessing and feature extraction.
2. Time-Consuming task − Another challenge faced by ML models is the consumption of time especially for data acquisition, feature extraction and retrieval.
3. Lack of specialist persons − As ML technology is still in its infancy stage, availability of expert resources is a tough job.
4. No clear objective for formulating business problems − Having no clear objective and well-defined goal for business problems is another key challenge for ML because this technology is not that mature yet.
5. Issue of overfitting & underfitting − If the model is overfitting or underfitting, it cannot be represented well for the problem.
6. Curse of dimensionality − Another challenge ML model faces is too many features of data points. This can be a real hindrance.
7. Difficulty in deployment − Complexity of the ML model makes it quite difficult to be deployed in real life.

**Applications of Machines Learning**

Machine Learning is the most rapidly growing technology and according to researchers we are in the golden year of AI and ML. It is used to solve many real-world complex problems which cannot be solved with traditional approach. Following are some real-world applications of ML −

* Emotion analysis
* Sentiment analysis
* Error detection and prevention
* Weather forecasting and prediction
* Stock market analysis and forecasting
* Speech synthesis
* Speech recognition
* Customer segmentation
* Object recognition
* Fraud detection
* Fraud prevention
* Recommendation of products to customer in online shopping

**How to Start Learning Machine Learning?**

Arthur Samuel coined the term “Machine Learning” in 1959 and defined it as a “Field of study that gives computers the capability to learn without being explicitly programmed”.

And that was the beginning of Machine Learning! In modern times, Machine Learning is one of the most popular (if not the most!) career choices. According to [Indeed](http://blog.indeed.com/2019/03/14/best-jobs-2019/), Machine Learning Engineer Is The Best Job of 2019 with a 344% growth and an average base salary of $146,085 per year.

But there is still a lot of doubt about what exactly is Machine Learning and how to start learning it? So this article deals with the Basics of Machine Learning and also the path you can follow to eventually become a full-fledged Machine Learning Engineer. Now let’s get started!!!

**How to start learning ML?**

This is a rough roadmap you can follow on your way to becoming an insanely talented Machine Learning Engineer. Of course, you can always modify the steps according to your needs to reach your desired end-goal!

Step 1 – Understand the Prerequisites

In case you are a genius, you could start ML directly but normally, there are some prerequisites that you need to know which include Linear Algebra, Multivariate Calculus, Statistics, and Python. And if you don’t know these, never fear! You don’t need a Ph.D. degree in these topics to get started but you do need a basic understanding.

(a) Learn Linear Algebra and Multivariate Calculus

Both Linear Algebra and Multivariate Calculus are important in Machine Learning. However, the extent to which you need them depends on your role as a data scientist. If you are more focused on application heavy machine learning, then you will not be that heavily focused on maths as there are many common libraries available. But if you want to focus on R&D in Machine Learning, then mastery of Linear Algebra and Multivariate Calculus is very important as you will have to implement many ML algorithms from scratch.

(b) Learn Statistics

Data plays a huge role in Machine Learning. In fact, around 80% of your time as an ML expert will be spent collecting and cleaning data. And statistics is a field that handles the collection, analysis, and presentation of data. So it is no surprise that you need to learn it!!!  
Some of the key concepts in statistics that are important are Statistical Significance, Probability Distributions, Hypothesis Testing, Regression, etc. Also, Bayesian Thinking is also a very important part of ML which deals with various concepts like Conditional Probability, Priors, and Posteriors, Maximum Likelihood, etc.

(c) Learn Python

Some people prefer to skip Linear Algebra, Multivariate Calculus and Statistics and learn them as they go along with trial and error. But the one thing that you absolutely cannot skip is Python! While there are other languages you can use for Machine Learning like R, Scala, etc. Python is currently the most popular language for ML. In fact, there are many Python libraries that are specifically useful for Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning such as Keras, TensorFlow, Scikit-learn, etc.

So if you want to learn ML, it’s best if you learn Python! You can do that using various online resources and courses such as Fork Python available Free on GeeksforGeeks.

Step 2 – Learn Various ML Concepts

Now that you are done with the prerequisites, you can move on to actually learning ML (Which is the fun part!!!) It’s best to start with the basics and then move on to the more complicated stuff. Some of the basic concepts in ML are:

**(a) Terminologies of Machine Learning**

* Model – A model is a specific representation learned from data by applying some machine learning algorithm. A model is also called a hypothesis.
* Feature – A feature is an individual measurable property of the data. A set of numeric features can be conveniently described by a feature vector. Feature vectors are fed as input to the model. For example, in order to predict a fruit, there may be features like color, smell, taste, etc.
* Target (Label) – A target variable or label is the value to be predicted by our model. For the fruit example discussed in the feature section, the label with each set of input would be the name of the fruit like apple, orange, banana, etc.
* Training – The idea is to give a set of inputs(features) and it’s expected outputs(labels), so after training, we will have a model (hypothesis) that will then map new data to one of the categories trained on.
* Prediction – Once our model is ready, it can be fed a set of inputs to which it will provide a predicted output(label).

**(b) Types of Machine Learning**

* Supervised Learning – This involves learning from a training dataset with labeled data using classification and regression models. This learning process continues until the required level of performance is achieved.
* Unsupervised Learning – This involves using unlabelled data and then finding the underlying structure in the data in order to learn more and more about the data itself using factor and cluster analysis models.
* Semi-supervised Learning – This involves using unlabelled data like Unsupervised Learning with a small amount of labeled data. Using labeled data vastly increases the learning accuracy and is also more cost-effective than Supervised Learning.
* Reinforcement Learning – This involves learning optimal actions through trial and error. So the next action is decided by learning behaviors that are based on the current state and that will maximize the reward in the future.

**Advantages of Machine learning**

1. Easily identifies trends and patterns -

Machine Learning can review large volumes of data and discover specific trends and patterns that would not be apparent to humans. For instance, for an e-commerce website like Amazon, it serves to understand the browsing behaviors and purchase histories of its users to help cater to the right products, deals, and reminders relevant to them. It uses the results to reveal relevant advertisements to them.

2. No human intervention needed (automation)

With ML, you don’t need to babysit your project every step of the way. Since it means giving machines the ability to learn, it lets them make predictions and also improve the algorithms on their own. A common example of this is anti-virus softwares; they learn to filter new threats as they are recognized. ML is also good at recognizing spam.

3. Continuous Improvement

As ML algorithms gain experience, they keep improving in accuracy and efficiency. This lets them make better decisions. Say you need to make a weather forecast model. As the amount of data you have keeps growing, your algorithms learn to make more accurate predictions faster.

4. Handling multi-dimensional and multi-variety data

Machine Learning algorithms are good at handling data that are multi-dimensional and multi-variety, and they can do this in dynamic or uncertain environments.

5. Wide Applications

You could be an e-tailer or a healthcare provider and make ML work for you. Where it does apply, it holds the capability to help deliver a much more personal experience to customers while also targeting the right customers.

**Disadvantages of Machine Learning**

1. Data Acquisition

Machine Learning requires massive data sets to train on, and these should be inclusive/unbiased, and of good quality. There can also be times where they must wait for new data to be generated.

2. Time and Resources

ML needs enough time to let the algorithms learn and develop enough to fulfill their purpose with a considerable amount of accuracy and relevancy. It also needs massive resources to function. This can mean additional requirements of computer power for you.

3. Interpretation of Results

Another major challenge is the ability to accurately interpret results generated by the algorithms. You must also carefully choose the algorithms for your purpose.

4. High error-susceptibility

Machine Learning is autonomous but highly susceptible to errors. Suppose you train an algorithm with data sets small enough to not be inclusive. You end up with biased predictions coming from a biased training set. This leads to irrelevant advertisements being displayed to customers. In the case of ML, such blunders can set off a chain of errors that can go undetected for long periods of time. And when they do get noticed, it takes quite some time to recognize the source of the issue, and even longer to correct it.